Charity and the end of empire: British Non-Governmental Organisations, Africa and international development in the 1960s[1]

In 1959, the British charity, Oxfam, was a small humanitarian agency devoted to dealing with refugees and emergency relief within Europe. Just five years later its income had more than quadrupled and it was channelling substantial funds to long-term overseas aid and development projects. It particularly focussed on rural poverty eradication activities in the British High Commission Territories of southern Africa. Across Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland it ran agricultural training centres, dam building programmes, school feeding schemes, forestry programmes and the provision of medical services to remote rural areas.[2] By 1967, Oxfam had given over £1million to the three territories and the British charitable contribution as a whole to Bechuanaland and Basutoland amounted to between one-third and one-quarter of the UK government's official spending on the Territories through the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund.[3]

None of this took place according to any grand scheme that set out a particular role for charity in the alleviation of global poverty. Rather, through the incremental, ad hoc, yet rapid expansion of its practices on the ground, Oxfam was redefining humanitarianism from its emergency to 'alchemical' character, as Michael Barnett puts it: that is, from the short term relief of poverty to the long term attempt to tackle its underlying causes.[4] This article examines from a British perspective this redefinition of humanitarianism in the crucial decade of decolonisation and development in the 1960s. It is part of a broader story that involves various national, international and transnational actors. Voluntary associations such as Oxfam, CARE, World Vision, Save the Children, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, Catholic Relief Services, and the Red Cross/Red Crescent all now operate in dozens of countries, employ tens of thousands of staff and raise billions of dollars from a mass donating public. Once minor appendages to official humanitarian relief operations such as the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), charities – or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as they have become increasingly known - have become some of the major players in global poverty reduction. The following essay focuses on Britain's three largest charities – the Save the Children Fund (SCF, founded in 1919), Oxfam (1942) and Christian Aid (1945) – which, by the end of the 1960s, had a combined income equivalent to over £100 million today, easily dwarfing the rest of the UK sector combined.[5] They had secured for themselves a foothold in the official machinery of aid that would continue to expand alongside unofficial forms of

assistance more generally: right through to today's world of billionaire donations, philanthro-capitalism and celebrity humanitarianism.

However, amidst all this expansion there was little agreement as to what the precise roles of charities and NGOs should be in the alleviation of global poverty and inequality. The relationship between charity and the state across the empire at the moment of decolonisation was never articulated as clearly in thought or in practice as it had been in Britain itself.[6]Indeed, it is this very ambiguity about the proper role of charity that explains its success in becoming a key solution for tackling global poverty. Charities have been many things to many people. For donors they were a route through which liberal internationalist sympathies could be directed. For aid workers, the modern NGO became a new way to realise age-old desires to be doing something constructively and immediately. For late colonial officials they were the agents that would step in where the state retreated, providing vital lessons in self-help for the future leaders of the country. For newly independent governments, they were both suppliers of western funds and props to impoverished social service departments. For those missionaries and imperialists who stayed on, they were a means to give something back to the country they had come to love and a channel through which older forms of colonial knowledge, expertise and belief could be utilised.

This essay approaches the subject of humanitarian charity from many of these perspectives. It is possible to do so because of the opening up of some significant new archives in Britain, especially those of Oxfam, Save the Children and Christian Aid. Of course, there are risks here of telling history purely from an institutional perspective. But most charities in the 1960s underwent tortuous internal wrangling over their proper role and function, or what constituted the full extent of their charitable remit. Their archives therefore pointedly illuminate a sector in transition and a key moment in humanitarianism's ongoing redefinition. More importantly, the staggering amounts of paperwork they generated, including field reports, assessments of specific projects, related materials generated by partner organisations, agencies and governments allow insights into the history of humanitarian aid from perspectives other than those of the donor, especially when read alongside memoirs, contemporary accounts and governmental and intergovernmental records. It means a better sense of the role of charitable humanitarianism can be built that has in mind both their relationships with other agencies back home and around the world and with their recipients on the ground.

The details from the archive deny the usefulness of any one over-riding interpretation. NGOs and charities were not simply the pawns in a game dominated by the interests of Cold War protagonists, colonial officials, postcolonial elites or even the diverse concerns of the

donating public. All of these factors played a role, as did charitable interventions on the ground, and so it is necessary to examine their complex roles from many angles if we are to understand how ambiguity drove their expansion. Accordingly, a first section focuses on the enrolment of British charities into the official machinery of aid during the United Nations' first Development Decade of the 1960s. Despite later attempts to position NGOs as offering an 'alternative' approach to development it will be seen that charities were closely connected to the official machinery of aid and development, especially through the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation's (FAO) Freedom From Hunger Campaign. Second, charities were a product of empire. From the expansion of social welfare by colonial governments in the 1930s through to decolonisation in the 1960s, there was a proliferation of aid projects which funded both modern NGOs and their predecessors in mission and charity. A case study of the High Commission Territories of southern Africa emphasises the interconnected nature of the late colonial state and the expanding NGO sector. Third, charitable solutions to global poverty were further embraced by new postcolonial states. Deliberate decisions were taken to divert resources to key aspects of national planning, often leaving gaps in the provision of social welfare which charities were invited to fill. It was at this moment, especially, that the ad hoc and ambiguous nature of NGOs came to the fore, as they began to find themselves in increasingly complex local circumstances buffeted by the interests and directions of governments of many kinds: global, colonial, national and civic. Amidst such complexity, whether charitable aid actually worked became only one consideration of many others. Indeed, a fourth section will show that knowledge as to whether NGO-administered aid was actually working was scant throughout the 1960s, and for many years after.[7] But at the time this was no bar to what many imagined the potential benefits of charitable development to be. All had an interest in 'cultivating success', as Grace Carswell puts it in her study of colonial Uganda, and in maintaining and expanding the NGO presence in Africa, especially at this time in the High Commission Territories.[8] That the reality could be ambiguous and the results disappointing was not the concern in these optimistic early years of development discourse.

As David Mosse explained in his recent ethnography of aid policy and practice, in 'cultivating development' what remains key is 'the control over the *interpretation* of events'.[9] That all could be seen to be doing something, and doing it through charitable agencies most likely to appear beyond the political battles of development assistance and Cold War geopolitics, ensured the continuation of the NGO presence. The turn to NGOs was, as Susan Pedersen has argued of the League of Nations Mandates, a 'system in motion' in which what was 'said' by the global development agencies 'bumped up against the aims, claims and

interests of the powers and peoples with which it was involved'.[10] The one constant in such a similarly confusing landscape was the increasing acceptability of NGOs in the provision of social welfare programmes across the developing world.

When explaining the emergence of modern humanitarianism, scholars have not emphasised the ad hoc, ambiguous and complex roles of charities. Instead they have tended to position them in relation to one dominant historical interpretation. Most simply, humanitarian NGOs have been analysed in contrast to the supposed massive, top-down, technocratic, modernisation-theory inflected developmentalism associated with the Cold War and the UN agencies. NGOs have been frequently championed as offering a bottom-up, locally-based approach.[11] In 1966, for instance, Oxfam was telling itself that it was more 'flexible' than the UN agencies.[12] A decade later, and more ambitiously, it announced it was leading 'The Quiet Revolution' of radical change from the grassroots upwards.[13] Social scientists often swallowed the rhetoric and celebrated the potential for 'development alternatives' offered through NGOs. There remains an optimistic reading of organizations to which many scholars remain attached, either politically, emotionally or formally.[14]What such an approach does is ignore how, even within official development programmes, there was as much attention given to the small-scale as there was to the large. As Daniel Immerwahr has recently shown in his history of US aid policy in the middle decades of the twentieth century, this was particularly apparent in the government's commitment to 'community development'.[15]

Historians of humanitarianism have usually contrasted imperial and post-imperial systems of relief. A common feature of the competing periodisations is the significance attached to the Second World War. The conflict is regarded as a vital instigator of change, not only for the massive mobilisation of official aid through the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, but through the consequent creation of an architecture of global governance and the modern 'invention of development' associated with President Truman's 'Point Four' speech.[16] Undoubtedly, humanitarianism and development were reborn after the war. But as historians such as Bruno Cabanes and Davide Rodogno have shown, such a narrative hides the significance of other wars, particularly the First World War.[17] And significant too were the important continuities that existed between the ideologies and practices of imperialism and the seemingly secular world of modernisation theory, human rights and development discourse.[18]

In particular, an emerging group of scholars, such as Mark Mazower, Caroline Shaw, Kevin Grant, Tehila Sasson and Michelle Tusan, have shown from a variety of perspectives

that modern international humanitarianism was a product of empire.[19] Voluntary organisations had long provided a range of social welfare services, with varying degrees of synergy with the colonial state. They ran prisons, hospitals, clinics, schools, leper colonies, maternal health centres, education programmes – all activities that extended mission into the secular realm. Their activities have led some to conclude that these initiatives offered either a 'pre-history' to the modern NGO, else NGOs were themselves the direct inheritors of the missionary impulse.[20] Their transition to the modern NGO was, however, facilitated over the middle decades of the twentieth century by the deliberate policies of decolonisation. Following the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts of 1929 and 1940, British colonial officials vastly expanded the technical apparatus necessary to economic and social development. No longer able to justify imperialism through racial ideology, the civilising mission or by assuming the loyalty of the native, development became a new means to legitimate empire. Building on Lord Hailey's *African Survey* of 1938, British researchers and policy-makers moved into the continent to offer what the historian of Kenya, John Lonsdale, has described as a 'second colonial occupation' aimed to bring benefits to the colonised as well as the colonisers.[21]

The continuities in personnel, systems of knowledge and technocratic practices have been much commented upon. This collective and scientific 'triumph' or 'rule of' expertise, as scholars such as Joseph Hodge, Helen Tilley and Timothy Mitchell have argued, often became the basis for development policy after independence and in the new global institutions associated with technical assistance.[22] Less acknowledged, though, is the role that charity played in this transfer. Financial retrenchment meant the British government published a white paper in 1957 on the UK's role in Commonwealth development that cut back its own commitments and turned instead for assistance from within the Commonwealth itself or from the multilateral aid system.[23] It also meant they turned to NGOs. While it could by no means be argued that NGOs filled the space left by the retreating state, they did at least enter it. At the same time, then, UN agencies such as the FAO provided a new centre of gravity that competed with the late colonial state in the setting of global norms and established forms of expertise. They created connections and exchanges that would see NGOs become very much a part of the 'epistemic' or transnational community of official and non-official actors.[24] As has been seen in a range of recent studies of population control, hunger, disease eradication, market protection and health policy, the interconnected nature of global governance has become more apparent.[25] NGOs were less the partners bringing an alternative plan of action, than the agents embedded within a dominant system of what later critics of the aid industry would characterise as 'neoliberal governmentality' which NGOs – unwittingly or otherwise – have promoted and

perpetuated.[26] Just as an imperial world order transitioned to one dominated by the UN, so charitable solutions to alleviate poverty not only continued but were consolidated, particularly within Britain's imperial possessions across Africa.

From missions to NGOs, then, charity has been a constant presence in both colonial and postcolonial world orders. Nevertheless, its continued if changing role across the middle decades of the twentieth century fits with what others have identified as a coherent chronological period, undivided by the usual reference to 1945. Indeed, historians have followed Frederick Cooper's lead in recognising the period from around 1940 to 1973 as the 'development era'. The transfer of expert personnel and ideas about development from the colonial state through to the international machinery of development and to postcolonial governments meant a developmentalist mindset prevailed across the period. But as Cooper and Randall Packard acknowledged as long ago as 1997, too little is known about the actual work of intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations in facilitating these continuities and connections.[27] While the official machinery of aid has attracted a growing number of historians, the work of NGOs, however, still requires further research.

Crucial to this acceptance of the importance of NGOs is the concomitant role of charity in the ever-changing definition of humanitarianism and the evolving contexts which shaped how both humanitarianism and charity were imagined.[28] At the end of empire non-state humanitarianism was transformed into a longer term commitment to aid and assist. Keith Watenpaugh has recently shown how, in the Near East, the humanitarian relief interventions of the 1920s were re-envisioned by their supporters as a 'permanent, transnational, institutional, neutral, and secular regime for understanding and addressing the root causes of human suffering'.[29] I follow this analysis, to show how charities and NGOs were also brought into this redefined humanitarian agenda at the end of empire. Older humanitarian agencies such as SCF reworked their principles, else adapted their functions to fit the new bureaucracy of development. Emerging agencies such as Oxfam embraced a form of liberal internationalism that could bypass the pressures of the Cold War and focus its energies on the seemingly depoliticised task of development. The changing contours of the global economy, shaken by war in the 1940s and rebalanced through the retreat from imperialism, created new opportunities for intervention which allied the technocratic impulse of the development planner with the older institutions of mission and empire on the ground. The rise of professional society and the increased authority of scientific expertise further strengthened the context for the emergence of a new humanitarian sensibility more geared towards long-term aid. New techniques became available which, as Thomas Haskell noted in his study of the transformation

of humanitarianism in an earlier century of capitalist formation, were able to 'change the conventional limits' within which people felt 'responsible enough to act'.[30] Just as British philanthropists went 'slumming' in the East End of London in the late-nineteenth century in order to see how they might assist the poor, so too did liberal internationalists, imbued with a technocratic eye and a professional, expert-oriented identity, seek to help the poor in regions of the world which matched disinterested compassion with the duties and responsibilities born of the legacies of empire.[31] Taken together, what can be seen to emerge in the middle decades of the twentieth century is an optimistic transnational institutional setting to deal with the world's problems within which charitable humanitarianism – and its transformation into development – easily resided.[32]

What all this suggests is an accelerated moment in the 1960s when charities emerged as a viable solution to tackling global poverty. Never the product of just one historical force or coherent outcome of any intended plan, they emerged in the midst of the competing, complex and often contradictory processes associated with what Stuart Hall often referred to as a historical conjuncture. In this sense, charities were 'over-determined' in being the consequence of so many influences acting upon them.[33] But significant too were the 'disjunctures' between policies and action that Ann Laura Stoler identified in her study of race and empire. The moment of decolonisation was likewise driven by 'the discrepancies between hard-line prescriptions and messier practices'.[34] Between official policies and grassroots situations lay the ambiguous function and effects of NGO actions. And just as Catherine Hall has shown how race had to be reworked across the empire into new, unanticipated hierarchies of difference after slave emancipation, so too did charitable humanitarianism have to be remade within the wider political economy of aid to become a new force in global development after independence.[35] Moreover, this confusing landscape for international intervention came at a moment when charity's political valency had been called into question. That is, just when charitable solutions to poverty on the domestic front were being eclipsed through he expansion of the social democratic welfare state, charity in Africa at the end of empire – for a whole variety of seemingly contradictory reasons – was emerging as the new 'common sense' in poverty eradication. Historical conjunctures and disjunctures therefore explain both the context within which charitable humanitarianism could exist, but provide too the reason its subsequent expansion and legitimation. As in other complex circumstances, ambiguity in role and function could become the actual motor of change.

To understand these continuities and changes it is necessary to first turn to the context of official development. Here, the Freedom From Hunger Campaign was crucial to how NGOs became a part of this redefinition of humanitarianism. The Campaign itself was very much the personal project of the FAO Director, Dr Binjay Ranjan Sen. Inspired by the World Refugee Year of 1959, the purpose was to enrol NGOs into a joint commitment to dealing with suffering in both the short and longer term.[36] Certainly they responded. The initial list of 75 international NGOs attending an FAO conference in 1960 included the most prominent women's organisations, trade unions, faith-based organizations and youth groups, as well as more technical and scientific communities with an interest in agricultural improvement.[37] They then created national Freedom From Hunger committees around the world, and not only in the richer nations. However, the UK Committee, supported by every political leader and presided over by the Duke of Edinburgh, became the most prominent, and raised by far the greatest amount of funds internationally.[38]

Freedom From Hunger transformed the humanitarian sector in Britain. First, it appealed to more general interest organisations such as the United Nations Association and various women's groups. Around 70 organisations would formally affiliate to the UK Committee.[39] It offered a means for engaging with internationalist causes, less tainted by the divisive politics of the Cold War, which had elsewhere reined in their internationalist enthusiasms.[40] Second, it was embraced by the leading humanitarian NGOs. Particularly associated with Oxfam, Christian Aid and War on Want, it enabled them to reorient their activities away from emergency relief towards long-term development. It also dragged other, more reluctant, NGOs such as SCF into the development fold. Finally, it captured the public imagination. Over 1,000 local Freedom From Hunger Committees were established and over £7 million was raised between 1960 and 1965. The sheer scale of success of its publicity meant NGOs found themselves constantly in search of new projects in order to spend the amounts raised.[41]

On first reading, the Campaign appears as a classic instance of Cold War modernist technocratic developmentalism. Certainly, it borrowed the language of official aid projects associated with technical assistance. Officials spoke of calories, nutrition, education and public health while publicity materials set out the problems of hunger, disease, squalor and overpopulation before proclaiming 'science already has the answers'.[42] But it was also imbued with a missionary fervour with Sen in particular setting the messianic tone. He believed it had unleashed 'a great force of constructive indignation and determination' that would eventually 'abolish poverty'.[43] His 1963 manifesto proclaimed freedom from hunger to be 'man's first fundamental human right'.[44] The Campaign provided the catalyst for the first of many World

Food Congresses and Sen pushed hard to ensure Freedom From Hunger was renewed for another five years in 1965 and again at the end of the decade.[45]

But it was in the complex institutional interactions that a new role for charity was being forged. Indeed, in the detailed aspects of its work it is possible to see the close connections the Campaign fostered between the UN infrastructure, the British state, colonial governments and NGOs. First, the Colonial Office was keen for Freedom From Hunger to succeed. It was actually the British government that first sponsored Sen's proposal to the FAO and Sen would approach it again to back his plans for its renewal.[46] The state oversaw the creation of the UK National Committee, enabling it to provide an umbrella organisation for the NGO community. This body not only allowed government officials to keep abreast of developments within the charitable sector, it also allowed it to gently dissuade more radical voices from pursuing a more independent voice. Despite the politicisation of the NGOs in the 1960s, when Oxfam and Christian Aid took on more lobbying and advocacy roles, the government was still able to maintain a regular dialogue through the Voluntary Committee on Overseas Aid and Development (VCOAD) which the new Ministry of Overseas Development helped form in 1965.[47] Even more importantly, in the first years of the Campaign, it was able to provide much needed introductions to officials throughout the colonies who were looking to support projects that could no longer attract UK funds and which FAO financing did not fully cover.[48]

Second, the Campaign fostered greater collaboration among NGOs as a whole. The connections made through the UK Committee made it easier to establish the Disasters Emergency Committee in 1963 (which co-ordinated fundraising across the sector in response to emergencies), VCOAD and later the more politically-motivated organisations led by the more radical elements in War on Want, Oxfam and Christian Aid, such as the Haslemere Group in 1968 and the World Development Movement in 1969, both of which lobbied for greater official aid. These collaborations provided the institutional infrastructure through which NGOs were able to speak with government officials at either the national or international level, particularly after the appointment of Barbara Castle as Britain's first overseas aid minister in 1965. Important debates took place within NGOs about the independence they should exercise from government. But the advantages of maintaining close contact with a wider development machinery through bodies such as Freedom From Hunger meant they did not seek to shut any doors that had only just been opened to them.[49]

This feature became apparent in the third consequence of the Campaign: the types of projects undertaken and the huge injections of cash it enabled. The UK Committee oversaw the implementation of 363 projects over the 1960s. The projects were incredibly diverse. They

ranged from loans to Antiguan fishermen, to a mechanics school in India to cattle and seed provision in Korea. The NGOs embarked on schemes approved by the FAO which went way beyond the traditional remit of British humanitarian agencies. But many of the larger schemes, or countries in which various schemes were packaged together, tended to be in former or soon-to-be independent colonial territories. In the first five years, Oxfam and Christian Aid alone spent over £400,000 in Kenya. India received between £800,000 and £900,000 from a whole host of NGOs working in tandem with UN organisations and the other non-UK NGOs such as the US-based Catholic Relief Services. The Colonial Office took up development plans from officials in various territories, ran them past the FAO in Rome and then assisted their packaging into smaller projects that could obtain the backing of the UK Committee or an individual NGO. At this moment, the Southern Africa High Commission Territories became a particular concern as their economies were eclipsed by the superior power of the Republic of South Africa (independent in 1961). Together, Basutoland (independent as Lesotho in 1966), Bechuanaland (Botswana, 1966) and Swaziland (1968) received over £500,000 of funding in the first five years of Freedom from Hunger, much of it through Oxfam and Christian Aid.[50]

The effects on the NGOs themselves were significant. Freedom From Hunger 'profoundly influenced the philosophy and approach of Oxfam'.[51] In 1960, Oxfam disbursed hardly any of its funds to long-term aid, but in that year it stated categorically that 'aid must go beyond philanthropy'.[52] It committed to raising £500,000 through Freedom From Hunger for agricultural projects over the next three years, but this soon rose to £1.8 million.[53] While most of this was spent on overseas aid, over the same period it went from being an organisation that spent much of its money on refugees, many of whom were in Europe, to one that was disbursing over £750,000 to Africa alone.[54] By the end of the first phase of Freedom From Hunger, Oxfam saw no end to its continued expansion. Its Director, H. Leslie Kirkley could imagine that commercial enterprise might set a limit on their expansion, but such 'negative thinking' was not appropriate for a charity for which continual expansion amidst a world experiencing suffering and poverty was both 'natural and right'.[55]

Yet while charities such as Oxfam imagined unlimited adventures in the post-imperial world order, the most frequent recipients of their funding would continue to be governments and missions. To provide just one snapshot, in the year from October 1962 Oxfam increased its activities in Basutoland. Approximately just under one-third of its assistance to the Territory went to private initiatives run by limited companies or other international agencies such as SCF working on the ground themselves or in partnership with local voluntary groups or missions. Around another third went directly to colonial government departments or officially-sanctioned

development schemes such as those of the Co-operative Banking Union. And a final third went to larger-scale agricultural training schemes, so that the charity supported the educational wings of broader technical assistance packages endorsed by intergovernmental agencies such as the FAO. Similar proportions are evident each year for the much larger Bechuanaland, with non-state recipients including the London Missionary Society, the British Red Cross, and the United Free Church of Scotland. But the trend towards official forms of assistance was clear.[56] As it poured hundreds of thousands of pounds over the course of the decade into an officially-sanctioned development plan in Bechuanaland it is difficult to see how it could present itself as the 'alternative' to top-down, technocratic assistance that it would later claim.[57] Indeed, it was obvious to many within Oxfam that it was both implicated within the wider structures of a new developmentalism and yet was also the key to the survival of the traditional voluntary organisations associated with an earlier civilising mission.

Other NGOs followed suit. Christian Aid was guided by the World Council of Churches which embraced the Freedom From Hunger agenda at its inception.[58] It worked closely with missions and national Christian councils which provided all sorts of introductions to government-backed schemes across Africa.[59] The more 'establishment' SCF (its patron was Queen Elizabeth II) found that Freedom From Hunger funds meant it had to find new projects in order to avoid being seen not spending its income.[60] Very soon, its portfolio had expanded and its operations on the ground resembled the schemes supported by Oxfam and Christian Aid.[61] The sector as a whole, then, was quickly transformed by Freedom From Hunger, making it appear that radical changes were taking place in humanitarian's embrace of development. Yet, through Freedom From Hunger, there were to be important continuities in the relationships they conducted with mission and empire.

Just as the new institutions of international aid invited the charities in, so too did a second important set of institutions ask for their assistance: colonial governments. For reasons not always in accord with UN initiatives, the late colonial state also shared an interest in the promotion of charity. Again, through no co-ordinated planning, the links between official and the unofficial sectors were nevertheless consolidated. The schemes promoted were diffuse and varied. In the run up to decolonisation SCF, for instance, was encouraged to tackle discordant elements of colonial youth through the establishment of boys homes across the empire. First in Malaya in 1946, but then in Somaliland, Sudan, Uganda and – most controversially – in Kenya during Mau Mau it set up 'places of safety' to control and contain, or 'rehabilitate', troublesome

adolescents.[62] Freedom From Hunger's schemes were much less punitive but they nevertheless further increased this concentration on the countries of the Commonwealth. Ninety-five of the 135 Freedom From Hunger projects funded in the first five years were put forward by departments of government, particularly in British or ex-British territories. When colonial governments themselves did not put in the requests, the machinery of international government provided the same function, especially when missionary organisations were too weak to be able to set out a development project for British backing. Instead, Freedom From Hunger allied the NGOs to FAO Projects, giving them 'an entrée to the governments of the under-developed countries which voluntary agencies did not always have'.[63]

This heightened proximity between charity and government can be seen most clearly through Oxfam's, and to a lesser extent Christian Aid's, activities in the High Commission Territories of southern Africa. Freedom From Hunger ushered NGOs into countries all around the world, but in southern Africa it set a number of precedents for co-operation between charity, the colonial state and international governance that would subsequently be witnessed across the rest of the continent. It is not difficult to understand why the NGOs wished to get involved in the High Commission Territories. As committed liberal internationalists they were always likely to be opposed to the anti-apartheid policies of the Republic of South Africa which economically dwarfed its neighbours, Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland. The Territories had been formally separated from the RSA in the 1931 Statute of Westminister, but by placing them under the administration of the High Commissioner rather than the Colonial Office they never received the same levels of investment of those colonies falling under the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts. Support for the High Commission Territories in the run-up to independence therefore became a popular political cause. In the face of perceived inaction by the British government many groups and individuals chose to support the economically weak against the strong at a time when the Republic's Nationalist government also reinforced its apartheid regime. No committed internationalist wanted the three Territories to become the latest additions to the racist Bantustans that had been set up in the 1950s as impoverished, ethnically segregated 'homelands'.[64]Liberal, progressive sympathies may well have motivated many seemingly radical NGO interventions, but the complexity of real-world, local situations only served to consolidate traditional charitable complicity with official administrations. Oxfam, couched its public pronouncements in terms of 'natural' duties to assisting British territories, though its sympathies were obviously more political. It deliberately offered a hand of friendship to political refugees seeking exile in the territories (especially across the more porous borders of Bechuanaland) and its staff at headquarters in Oxfam posed

with visiting Basutho chiefs on official visits.[65] On the ground it supported initiatives such as a self-help agricultural scheme in Bechuanaland run by the anti-apartheid activist, Guy Clutton-Brock. Meanwhile, Christian Aid and War on Want worked closely with Amnesty International to help refugees leave the High Commission Territories to a development farm in northern Rhodesia.[66] Thanks to the accusations made by many sympathisers of the Republic's regime, both Christian Aid and Oxfam came under the scrutiny of the Charity Commissioners who were concerned that the NGOs were deliberately politicising their development work.[67]

Behind this radical veneer, however, hid a much more deeply embedded relationship between state and charity, reminiscent of that between mission and empire. This connection was, therefore, deeply traditional, and yet also a pointer to a new political economy of aid at the very ends of empire. Oxfam immediately targeted the High Commission Territories for Freedom From Hunger projects. It initially set aside £100,000 for three years though this would rise to £500,000 soon afterwards.[68] But it spent this money in partnership with the state. The Aid Director, Bernard Llewellyn, met with the High Commissioner for the Protectorates, Sir John Maud, who assured him that Oxfam would have the full co-operation of the Resident Commissioners and further wished to explore 'the possibility that Oxfam might give further large-scale aid to the Protectorates'.[69] Duly encouraged, Oxfam appointed its first Field Director, T. F. [Jimmy] Betts, in 1961 and gave him 'roving commission' to search for projects in the Territories.[70]

Betts, the brother of Barbara Castle, had spent 24 years with the colonial service as a forestry officer in Nigeria. Along with so many other colonial officials, in the run up to independence he sought an alternative career.[71] This began at the Fabian Colonial Bureau in London, where Betts strengthened his sympathies with African nationalism, particularly through a friendship with Tanzania's future leader, Julius Nyerere.[72] As his work for Oxfam began he maintained his close links with the British government and the Colonial Office assisted his work. He produced what would become known as the 'Betts' report' in Whitehall circles.[73] This document drew extensively on previous surveys of the region by colonial officials, especially those undertaken by Lord Hailey, who followed up his *Africa Survey* with a more detailed examination of the High Commission Territories in 1953 and by Chandler Morse's still more recent effort to set out a path to economic development.[74] But in turn, the 'Betts' report' also informed official thinking. The Colonial Office was thus able to take into account NGO activities in setting out its own overseas aid policy as colonial territories continued to move towards independence.[75] NGOs, as much as think tanks and academics of many persuasions, were conduits for the transfer of expertise at the end empire. [76]

Betts' 53-page initial report for Oxfam and the Colonial Office was but the precursor to a series of proposals that amounted to around one-quarter of the £1.8million of Freedom From Hunger projects that Oxfam was committing itself to by 1963.[77] The £1million Oxfam had soon spent on the three territories (through Freedom From Hunger and from its general funds), had all been built from the foundations set by Betts in 1961 when he had committed the organisation, like so much official assistance, to 'long-term aid, given in depth, to a selected area'.[78] The Colonial Office was understandably well disposed towards this work in the Territories.[79] As Oxfam and others began to expand their operations, government officials began to see in the British NGOs both an alternative source of funding and a mechanism to promote the voluntary spirit which it believed would be essential to the soon-to-be independent nations. Development planning reports written by the Colonial Office at the end of the 1950s rarely mentioned NGOs. By the early 1960s, as the opportunities afforded by Freedom From Hunger became more obvious, this changed dramatically.. The Colonial Office worked closely with the Basutoland government, for instance, to put together a package of projects that could be financed by Freedom From Hunger. Taken in isolation, each of these schemes was quite small, though the largest reached into six figures. But taken as a package they totalled over £½ million, or about one quarter of the British government's aid for agricultural projects. Despite repeated assurances that voluntary schemes were to be 'complementary and supplementary' to official aid, the blurring of the lines was becoming apparent to all.[80]

The Colonial Office was obliged to set out development plans for many of its possessions in the run up to independence, to pave the way for economic as well as political autonomy. As in Basutoland Oxfam featured prominently in the Bechuanaland Protectorate Development Plan for the three years prior to independence in 1966. While the amounts disbursed by the NGO amounted to no more than 10% when all forms of assistance were factored in (including loans and the large grants for infrastructure projects) the totals for the myriad small agricultural schemes were approaching levels around one-third to one half of the amounts spent through the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund.[81]

All of this did not yet amount to a transfer of economic and social planning from the UK government to the charities. But it did amount to a complex economy of welfare that the late colonial state did much to encourage, in practice if not according to an overall strategy as to the precise lines demarcating official from unofficial assistance. The NGOs therefore had a small but significant presence at the moment when power was handed over to the new postcolonial elites.

The expansion of charitable assistance after independence was also the product of a third group of actors: the new ruling elites. The post-colonial, as much as the late-colonial, state was to be an important promoter of western charitable assistance. Indeed, there appeared to be a seamless extension of NGOs' roles conducted alongside and in tune with development more generally. Freedom From Hunger encouraged charities to continue working with postcolonial governments. As Bechuanaland approached independence, for instance, British NGOs collectively pledged a further £500,000 with Christian Aid and Oxfam providing £100,000 each.[82] The 'gift' was brokered by the new Ministry of Overseas Development and handed over as a package to the Deputy Prime Minister, Quett Masire.[83] From this base in southern Africa Oxfam spread its activities throughout the continent, first to East Africa and Malawi and then setting out a more general set of principles for a base of operations in West Africa.[84] As its number of Field Officers grew, Oxfam appeared part of the technocratic impulse. It was eager to work with postcolonial governments, casting aside some of its previous doubts about its non-governmental and independent role, and it began to set out a policy on 'international relations' to better co-ordinate its activities with the UN infrastructure.[85] Betts himself moved to East Africa where he pioneered schemes of 'integrated rural development' that focussed activities of all agencies on one particular region or area.[86] He was also a strong advocate for making Oxfam operational, taking over activities directly. He believed that although many experts had stayed on in Africa, not all desired or could find work at the UN yet many were losing their positions through the 'Africanisation' of the post-independence civil services. NGOs might take advantage of such a labour market in the new postcolonial era.

But as charities and NGOs began to work with postcolonial governments they found themselves in ever more complex local circumstances. There would prove to be no real model for how NGOs should interact with new governments and older imperial institutions. Just as earlier voluntary organisations encountered empire in all its complex and diverse forms, so too did NGOs occupy different positions and functions across postcolonial states. There was a wide diversity to the patterns of social provision emerging as various actors and organisations jostled for position and authority in the exciting if uncertain years following independence. Precisely because of this it is difficult to draw general patterns of issues encountered on the ground, though charities were becoming increasingly aware of the problems of working with government. For instance, they constantly sought to fund discrete projects that did not rely on ongoing government support that they suspected would never be forthcoming. Resignedly they often had to shrug their shoulders as they took on projects either shelved by the colonial state

or not picked up by the postcolonial government that chose to support other ventures in the knowledge that Oxfam might be encouraged to persist.[87] As Gregory Mann has argued of West Africans government formerly under French rule, at the moment of actual independence these were states far from being as weak as has often been assumed.[88] They took strong, active decisions about the allocation of resources, including diverting funds from social welfare programmes that they knew could be picked up by the humanitarian agencies. That said, truly impoverished states could be the most disarmingly honest about their situation. An official in Malawi's Ministry of Finance admitted that his country's entire overseas aid budget could only be met by outside help and acknowledged that 'we have therefore to turn to organisations such as Oxfam'.[89] The former French territory, Upper Volta, basically invited Oxfam in, knowing that it had so few resources itself to deal with some of the worst poverty levels in the world.[90]

Yet even the most discrete form of charitable assistance could also become intertwined not only with postcolonial politics but with broader geo-political considerations too. One extended example tells the story of many. In 1966, Oxfam began work on a school feeding programme in Kenya that was quickly beset with problems. There was lack of co-ordination with one of its partners, the original instigators of the scheme, the US-based Catholic Relief Services (CRS). Personnel problems saw a particularly unproductive relationship develop between the scheme's administrator, Mrs Haggie, the wife of a settler colonial, and the officials of the Nairobi City Council as well as the national civil service. The scheme blurred the line in a highly problematic manner between the voluntary and the official sector, leading to arguments as to whether Oxfam or the National Council of Social Service (in turn under the aegis of the Ministry of Co-operatives and Social Services) was in control of the scheme. And Oxfam naively developed a commercial food supplement, Supro, without fully considering the conflicts of interests bound to arise once it began to distribute its own product through the schools. The scheme itself failed to reach the very poorest children and it showed few signs of becoming self-sufficient, a key criterion for long term development. It also fell foul of the push for Africanisation when the Secretary General of the trade union movement and politician Clement Lubembe, interfered and attempted to have all the funding and staffing decisions placed at his discretion through his largely self-appointed role as President of the National School Feeding Council. To complicate matters still further, Lubembe had long been trying to develop close links with the US labour movement and the US more generally. He preferred the CRS to run the scheme as this potentially opened the door to the far more attractive proposition of more substantial USAID funds. But Oxfam was unwilling to cede control to its original contact, since the CRS Programme Director for Kenya, Dick Wissolick, had earlier pulled CRS

out of the Supro collaboration, probably because it would have hampered the distribution of US agricultural food surpluses as food aid through CRS. That Wissolick was able to act so independently in his interactions between CRS, Oxfam, the Nairobi Council and the Kenyan government was also due to what most felt to be his close connections to the US Central Intelligence Agency. Unsurprisingly, the overseas aid director assessed the scheme as 'a costly attempt to fly before we can walk' and in this case at least, Oxfam was eventually relieved to pull out in 1969.[91]

NGOs were never able to plot their own course through these complex landscapes of institutions and interests all shaping newly independent African countries. Yet these other actors too were also seeking to mould the activities of NGOs to suit their own myriad purposes. In the High Commission Territories, problems persisted as NGOs consolidated their presence. The issue in Botswana and Lesotho was less the sheer complexity of the individual schemes (though this was a problem too), but more the way in which NGO involvement was subject to the machinations of governmental and intergovernmental politics and planning. Christian Aid and Oxfam found themselves involved in the sorts of top-down development planning such as dam building to which they otherwise pitched themselves as the alternative.[92] Judging from the letters of thanks sent by government officials Botswana's new leaders were extremely grateful for another source of income.[93] But this income came through varying degrees of co-ordination produced by other, more powerful agents. Most importantly, just prior to independence in 1966, the UN began to plan a role for its own departments once the British state had pulled out. Its Special Committee on Decolonization (the Committee of 24) wanted to create a special fund for the three territories, something which the British government only reluctantly supported given its own preparations for a bilateral aid (ie loans) programme.[94] The British also wished to avoid being seen to give too much support to the countries as it did not want to offend the South Africans. These diplomatic considerations in turn restricted the ambitions of the UN in the region. While these dynamics prevented the articulation or implementation of an overall development strategy for the three countries, which remained in desperate need of some form of assistance, what they did do was encourage the development of a larger number of smaller – and uncoordinated – schemes. These could be supported by the politically neutral Freedom From Hunger Campaign and be part-funded by NGOs such as Oxfam and Christian Aid which could also claim a more impartial interest in development.

Just as they had prior to independence, then, each project on its own might therefore appear as a charitable intervention with few other implications, but taken as a whole they constituted a package of charitable aid most appropriate for the politically toxic issue of the

economic and social development of South Africa's precarious anti-apartheid neighbours.[95] More generally, the parameters were also being put in place for charities (with their all-too-imprecisely defined roles) to flourish in the postcolonial world as much as their predecessors had in the colonial.

These extraordinarily complex examples of aid on the ground can be repeated over and over again across the whole continent. Such complexity was not in itself a problem. So long as it was possible to assess with precision what type of project and what type of inter-relationship actually worked best, then models for future action and intervention could be mapped out. Indeed, this question of 'scaling up' from the specific to the general – from the isolated and local to the continent-wide – has arguably been the utopian driver behind much developmentalism over several decades. The more precise problem in the 1960s, though, was that no one knew for sure what constituted effective aid or how NGOs should work with communities and governments. In the absence of such knowledge, the charities ran 'hither and thither' across the continent, as Oxfam's Aid Appraiser put it at the end of the Development Decade.[96] They had no co-ordinated plan of action or overall sense of the appropriate balance between government and charity. Projects were known not to work and in extreme cases, problems were worsened. The examples cited above are but the more everyday instances of the more spectacular forms of complexity seen in the likes of the Nigerian civil war at the end of the 1960s. Here, NGOs largely sided with the Biafran rebels in the oil-rich east of the country in their independence struggle with the Nigerian government, only to be exploited in such a way that they helped extend the conflict with further loss of life and more human suffering.[97] Likewise, in Tanzania, Michael Jennings has traced how idealist support for Nyerere's Ujamaa in the 1970s ultimately led to the NGOs becoming 'surrogates' of an increasingly authoritarian state.[98]

The problems of complexity and diversity were not overcome despite efforts to better understand NGO 'effectiveness'. One problem was that the line between assessing the effectiveness of a project and advertising its successes as part of a wider publicity campaign was not always apparent. Oxfam commissioned the journalist, Peter Gill, to provide an 'independent investigation' of its Freedom From Hunger projects in 1970. But his eight-week whistle stop tour from Calcutta to Peru was never going to provide any more depth than what Oxfam required in its subsequent glowing and nicely packaged publication, *Drops in the Ocean*.[99] Behind the scenes, there had been murmurings of disquiet for some time. At Oxfam,

Betts had long offered 'devastating' critiques of what he considered to be 'ill-researched, bureaucratically hatched, high cost schemes'.[100] As early as 1963, British civil servants were raising concerns about the sustainability of Freedom From Hunger projects.[101] In 1966, the Ministry of Overseas Development initiated a survey of schemes in Botswana, by D. S. Thornton, Reader in Agricultural Economics at the University of Reading.[102] In 1968, Oxfam appointed its first Aid Appraiser, Bernard Llewellyn, a close ally of Betts within the organisation. He constantly bemoaned the wastefulness of much of Oxfam's spending and its overall lack of co-ordination and strategic direction.[103] Other charities were slower off the mark, though eventually most would begin to offer rudimentary assessments of their projects.

Yet the significance of these early aid assessments is less to do with the technical precision of their findings than in how they were received. In the absence of objective criteria for measuring the value of aid, ambiguity always enabled success to be claimed. The way reports were interpreted within and across institutions was more important than their actual content. At Oxfam, for instance, Llewellyn's concerns about misspent funds, inappropriate relationships with governments and lack of measurable objectives were more often aired than acted upon.[104] Staff chose instead to retain a hope for the success of the next pragmatic project put before a grant committee. Likewise, at Christian Aid an extensive investigation of its activities in Botswana found a variety of problems and inefficiencies in the delivery of aid that called into question the whole validity of its operations in the country.[105] The author of the report nevertheless concluded that with just a few tweaks and adjustments, all of his identified failings could be eradicated and future success would be assured. Despite evidence to the contrary, then, success was proclaimed in Botswana by this NGO and, indeed, for many years after by the wider international aid community.

It is this mixture of critique and optimism that lies behind the more general reaction to assessment. Most significant was the FAO's commissioning of J. A. Ponsioen of the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague. Taking its cue from the comprehensive review of the entire structure of development within the official agencies of the UN at the end of the 1960s, the FAO was concerned to know how its money had been spent over the first decade of Freedom From Hunger. Ponsoien found that, overall, success had been partial, though in some areas 'substantial'. Nevertheless, he identified a litany of problems that included the absence of communication, co-ordination and complementarity between agencies, the lack of technical skills of many NGOs, confusion over the total assistance given by various donors to any one project, the paternalistic attitude of certain agencies, the imposition of too many restrictive conditions upon recipients, the reliance on 'impressions' and 'feelings' about projects by NGO

staff, and the absence of evaluations and the related willingness to report successes rather than failures.[106] Yet none of this was enough to stop the FAO renewing its commitment to working with NGOs. Freedom From Hunger was extended in 1970 for a further ten years to cover the Second Development Decade.

Nevertheless, Freddie Lees, the secretary to the NGOs' umbrella body, VCOAD, was taken aback by Ponsoien's findings. He pushed for all the NGOs to discuss the criticisms of aid effectiveness, which he believed amounted to a 'crisis'.[107]Yet individual NGOs were unwilling to respond. Members of VCOAD accepted the need for greater co-ordination, for better field management, for more appraisal and for better record keeping. These acknowledgements of the problem became key drivers for the further professionalization of the sector in measuring aid effectiveness and reflecting on the changing policies of the NGO contribution.[108] But there was always a defensiveness to their partial acceptance of a problem and an unwillingness to lose their independence. As Lees put it, 'it is the very strength of the NGOs – their flexibility, their freedom, the comparative absence of bureaucracy – all productive of so many benefits, that equally gives rise to the defects that have been listed'.[109] Ultimately, he believed the 'lack of reaction of most of the organisations' to the Ponsioen study was 'due to their need to clarify their own thinking about the place and role of their project in the development process'.[110]

At the end of the first decade of Freedom From Hunger, then, NGOs had participated in the redefinition of humanitarianism to incorporate long term aid as well as immediate relief in times of emergency. In so doing they had created a space for themselves to occupy in development that was ready to receive ever more funds and lead to the massive expansion of NGOs in subsequent decades. But just at the point when all were ready for this to happen most of the key players were still unsure as to what, precisely, worked on the ground and what the relationship to postcolonial and international governance should be.

The history of charitable humanitarianism presented here has been very much a British one. Certainly, there is much to suggest its more general applicability is limited. The voluntarist tradition was not always as strong in other contexts. The French empire, for instance, lacked the same degree of enrolment of charities in the administration of its more limited social welfare programmes. US humanitarianism was shaped to a far greater extent by the imperatives of the Cold War rather than the legacies of empire, though the two are inseparable, and bodies such as USAID demonstrate the far greater importance of official funding being channelled

deliberately and purposefully through the voluntary sector for state interests. The same was true for countries without imperial traditions, with the Scandinavian governments in particular – arguably for more progressive ends – being keen to expand their development agenda. But as has been seen, aid to individual countries, and even particular projects, was usually received from a variety of sources. NGOs worked in communication with one another, and British charities funded schemes alongside their American and European counterparts, often according to similar principles, practices and ways of thinking. British missions had long worked with their counterparts from other countries, especially Germany. The Cold War created a space for aid to be represented as apolitical leading to the embrace of development by women's groups and other types of voluntary association the world over. And 'small' states such as Ireland, with limited resources and different experiences of empire, nevertheless saw in the development decades, opportunities for humanitarian agencies to make their mark on a world stage otherwise dominated by the superpowers. There may have been many reasons for embracing the world of NGOs, but embrace them is what many governments and intergovernmental organisations did. [111]

For all the specificities of the British case, then, it becomes more useful to consider NGO policy and practice as much a transnational phenomenon than the comparable products of different national societies.[112] This was noted at the end of the first development decade when the World Bank published its report of the Commission on International Development. Lester Pearson's *Partners in Development* focused on official aid, but he also noted the growing importance of the private voluntary sector. While official development assistance was calculated to fluctuate between $6 and $7 billion per year in the late 1960s, NGOs were believed to be handling up to £1billion annually, at least $700 million of which was raised from private sources.[113] The 'partners' in the title of the report referred to the global South generally. But the descriptor was perhaps more aptly applied to the charities and NGOs which had now become very much a part of the wider machinery of aid and development.

Subsequent investigations into the aid industry have continued to praise the distinctive contribution of the unofficial sector and have reaffirmed the logic of partnership found in Pearson. However, much less recognised is what has been set out in this article: that NGOs were very much a part of the governance of development at the launch of the modern era of international aid. There was an embrace of charity long before the aid business was recognised and critiqued by many scholars following in the wake of James Ferguson's study of Lesotho in the period after that examined here.[114] Indeed, by positioning the 1960s as a moment of acceleration of processes well underway throughout the middle decades of the twentieth

century it is possible to see the continuities from empire and the manner in which charity consolidated rather than invented its position in the alleviation of poverty.

Yet none of these points explains *why* NGOs and charities came to have such a considerable, if uncertain, presence. Notwithstanding the fact that charities were subjected to the differing agendas of nation states and the institutions of the Cold War's world order, they did not consistently operate on the ground utilising practices and forms of knowledge that coherently connected their activities to wider narratives of modernisation-theory inflected developmentalism. To be sure, there was a space for charity created within such a system but it is the uncertainties as to what NGOs' precise role was to be that is key here. In this essay I have argued that it was NGOs' ambiguous role at the conjunctural moment of decolonisation and development that provides a causal explanation for their subsequent expansion. In the former British imperial possessions across Africa charities were 'doing good' in a whole variety of pragmatic and uncoordinated ways as funding from Freedom From Hunger poured in. These were incredibly diverse, often incoherent, and involved a whole series of intersections with international agencies, colonial officials, newly independent governments, social entrepreneurs, local elites, voluntary groups and faith-based organisations. All of these recognised the ability of NGOs to work on the ground, to be pragmatic and to be flexible, key characteristics which would come to be celebrated as the NGOs' 'alternative' route to development. But if this was a model of development, it was one in which no one was sure what worked and no one knew what the overall purpose of the non-state sector was to be. The story here is reminiscent of the 'unruly practices' that Stoler argues to have characterised the complexities of everyday colonialism.[115] But the phrase too captures the messy implementations of international aid and development policies by charities operating within a familiar if different world order.

It is the confusing, complex and contradictory nature of NGO projects that lies behind the embrace of the sector. It was in the interests of donors, aid workers, charity staff, colonial officials, post-independence political elites, international agency employees, ex-pat volunteers and missionaries not to put too fine a definition on the role and scope of charitable intervention. As disputes arose over which projects yielded the greatest returns and all those with a stake in any one project defended that which they valued, then ultimately all types of project continued, and all agents persisted in projecting onto the NGO presence their hopes and plans for the future of development.

What has emerged is an ever-expanding sector that continues to mean different things to different people. One consequence is an ongoing debate within the NGO community about

the definition of humanitarianism and the appropriate mix of emergency relief and long-term assistance. There are debates too about whether NGOs can intervene, about the closeness of unofficial to official forms of governance and the extent to which NGOs have become the auxiliaries to new forms of empire, especially after the rise of the security agenda.[116] But in all of this NGOs continue their seemingly inexorable expansion, their pragmatism and flexibility meaning that they can also respond and adapt to any criticism thrown at them. This is not to deny the undoubted good work that they continue to do, and the tremendous effects they can have on individual lives where their projects have obviously worked. But it is to acknowledge that the essentially ambiguous nature of their myriad projects and programmes has been key to how charity has come to occupy the space it has in the global political economy of aid.

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[5] The exception is the British Red Cross which I have excluded from the comparison because it was the one humanitarian agency that did not shift its focus from emergency relief.

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